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SUBJECT: BELARUS NAMES FOR ASSET FREEZE

Classified By: DCM CONSTANCE PHILIPOT FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Post provides the following information to supplement that gathered by the Department in consideration of placing assets freezes on certain Belarusian regime officials.

Natalya Petkevich  
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¶2. (C) Natalya Petkevich: Petkevich was appointed as Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration in November 2004. The PA announced she was given the specific assignment to, "supervise work to improve the legislative basis of the country, coordinate the activities of the presidential legal agencies and the judiciary, and maintain contact with the legislature." A lawyer by training, Petkevich has been in charge of drafting and getting passed new legislation, as well as preparing numerous presidential decrees. Since Petkevich took office Lukashenko has signed a number of decrees specifically aimed at cutting off financing for pro-democracy forces and civil society, as well as aimed at closing political parties, NGOs and independent newspapers.

¶3. (C) In addition, under Petkevich's direction the GOB has adopted several new laws aimed specifically against the democratic opposition, including but not limited to: restrictive new political party and NGO laws (05 Minsk 884), an "extremism law" aimed at opposition political activities (05 Minsk 1363), amendments to the criminal code outlawing much political activity and making it a crime to "discredit" Belarus or its government (05 Minsk 1437 and 1537), as well as several laws aimed to curtail the flow of resources to the opposition. These laws have been used to jail a number of pro-democracy activists (specifically Minsk 327, 393 and 205), and to accuse pro-democracy forces of terrorism (Minsk 281). (Note: Presidential decrees in Belarus take precedence over laws, and do not require confirmation by parliament. While parliament has the constitutional responsibility to approve laws, in practice it is a rubber stamp body that merely approves legislation proposed by the Presidential Administration. Only in rare cases has parliament challenged a proposed law, and then only on relatively technocratic issues (see 04 Minsk 1379).)

Viktor Lukashenko  
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¶4. (C) Viktor Lukashenko: Formally the president's National Security Advisor, by many accounts Viktor is also de facto Head of Presidential Security. Reliable sources in both the Milinkevich and Kozulin camps told us Viktor personally commanded units involved in the March 24 dismantling of the

protest tent city and the March 25 crackdown on a peaceful march. In both cases police under Viktor's direct command beat a number of pro-democracy activists. For instance, on March 24, OMON commander Yury Podobed could be heard on tape telling his troops not to mistreat detainees. However, numerous detainees reported to us and to human rights groups that they were beaten and abused by Presidential Security troops under Viktor Lukashenko's command (Minsk 337). Post has reliably heard that Viktor ordered his troops to use violence on those dates. Viktor also reportedly holds a position on the Security Council, which includes supervision over SOBR, Almaz, Presidential Security and the BKGB. These units were all used to arrest and beat peaceful pro-democracy activists.

15. (C) The president briefly appointed his son Viktor as deputy head of the newly founded BEST state-owned cell phone company in 2005 (despite his complete lack of experience in the field), and Viktor held a senior position in the State Military Industrial Committee, where he was reportedly responsible for clandestine arms transfers to the Middle East (05 Minsk 470).

Dmitry Lukashenko  
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16. (C) Dmitry Lukashenko: Given the opaque and secretive nature of the Lukashenko regime, Post's information on Dmitry largely consists of hearsay and rumor. However, Post feels that the wealth of stories of Dmitry's corruption, many from reliable long-term sources, are indicative that Lukashenko's sons are both illicitly profiting from their father's rule. Post strongly argues for inclusion of Dmitry among those whose assets are being frozen.

17. (C) Post can confirm that Dmitry is Head of the Presidential Sports Club and lives in the Drozdy compound (a neighborhood of extremely expensive houses controlled by the Presidential Administration. Many of these homes were seized from foreign ambassadors in 1997--05 Minsk 1271). Post can also confirm that Dmitry is a Lt. Colonel in the Border Guards. Post cannot confirm if Dmitry is the only example, but it is extremely unlikely that one as young as Dmitry could honestly attain such a rank. One reputable source told Post Dmitry uses his position in the Border Guards to extort bribes from particularly Lithuanian businessmen attempting to ship goods across the Belarusian border. Dmitry reportedly threatens these goods with confiscation if the bribe is not paid. He is also rumored to own a restaurant frequented by Minsk's ultra-rich in Minsk's Old Town. Dmitry is known to drive a black Hummer without license plates. Such a vehicle is far outside the reach of a Border Guard Lt. Colonel, whose salary would be under USD 500 a month.

Nikolay Cherginets  
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18. (C) Nikolay Cherginets: Cherginets was the head of Lukashenko's 2001 election campaign. The OSCE observation mission judged this election as not free and fair. The OSCE's report on the elections found that Lukashenko's regime and his executive structures were directly responsible for major electoral violations. Specific electoral flaws noted in the OSCE observation report include:

- A political regime that is not accustomed to and does everything in its power to block the opposition;
- Executive structures with extensive powers, including rule by presidential decree, that are not balanced by commensurate legislative controls, and that allow the arbitrary changing of the electoral environment;
- An election administration system that is overly dependent on the executive branch of government from the national level to the local community levels, and is partial;
- A campaign of intimidation directed against opposition activists, domestic observation organizations, opposition and

independent media, and a smear campaign against international observers.

In recent Belarusian presidential elections the head of the incumbent's campaign has wielded tremendous power in directing the undemocratic conduct of elections. As head of Lukashenko's campaign in 2001, Cherginets was directly in charge of the above abuses.

¶9. (C) Cherginets is also currently leading the fight to destroy the Union of Belarusian Writers. The UBW is an independent writer's union that has become actively pro-democratic. In November 2005 the regime accused the UBW of becoming involved in politics, so Cherginets (an author of detective stories) quit the UBW and founded the pro-Lukashenko Union of Writers of Belarus (UWB). A special police detachment prevented writers considered to be insufficiently pro-Lukashenko from attending the UWB's founding congress. Cherginets personally accused the UBW of not supporting Lukashenko, and state media launched several attacks against the UBW. In January the regime told academic institutions to prevent students and staff from holding UBW events, but to allow UWB events. The head of the UBW was fired from his work and stripped of his PhD. Despite successfully defending itself in court from closure, the government has kicked the UBW out of its offices and ordered the organization to pay a massive amount of back-rent, after the state retroactively raised the UBW's rent.

¶10. (C) In addition, Cherginets has made a number of public statements aiding the regime's propaganda. Most egregiously, he claimed the United States was using chemical weapons in Afghanistan, and in April 2006 he accused the U.S. of "returning to the time of the Cold War," and "calling to overthrow the legally elected authorities in Belarus," because of its support for pro-democracy forces.  
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